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U.S Environmental Protection Agency

California Department of Corrections

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EPA, CDC LAUD NATION'S FIRST WET CLEANING PRISON

New alternative to dry cleaning produces less pollution

SAN FRANCISCO **B** Officials from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the California Department of Corrections visited Soledad State Prison today to announce the first program in the country where inmates will use wet cleaning **B** an environmentally responsible alternative to dry cleaning **B** as part of its vocational training program.

The program, made possible by a \$10,000 federal grant from the Vocational and Technical Education Act and an additional \$12,000 in CDC vocational funds, allows inmates at Soledad to process 23 tons of laundry per year while learning a new trade. Prisoners clean officers= uniforms, prison employees= clothing, and laundry for local non-profit organizations, such as school band uniform and graduation gowns.

In addition, the EPA provided \$40,000 to the Environmental Finance Center in Hayward to promote the vocational wet cleaning project.

"This innovative project not only benefits our air and water, but it trains a future work force in a burgeoning environmental field,@said Jack Broadbent, the EPA's air division director in San Francisco. "This is a great example of government working together to benefit the common good.@

"This project supports the goals of the Vocational and Technical Education Act in that it further advances technology in the classroom," CDC Acting Director Steven Cambra, Jr. said.

"Our vocational instructors are always looking for ways to improve our equipment and to initiate new innovative technology,@said CTF Warden Jim Hamlet

"Dry cleaners are not opposed to wet cleaning, but they're reluctant to make the investment. According to our research, for professional wetcleaning to prosper, we need to increase consumer awareness of and demand for this alternative and then provide a better trained workforce." said Susan Blachman, Associate Director of the Environmental Finance Center,

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Region IX. "This program offers that training."

Soledad vocational training officials contacted the Environmental Finance Center after attending an EPA-sponsored wet cleaning seminar in 1997. Since instituting the program in November, the prison has cut its operating costs by 80 percent and reduced its use by 50 percent of perchlorethylene B a possible human carcinogen.

What is Wet Cleaning?

Wet cleaning is a pollution prevention method for cleaning clothes that is technically and financially comparable to conventional dry cleaning. More than 80 percent of dry cleaners nationwide use perchloroethylene, a hazardous air pollutant, in their cleaning processes. Perchloroethylene-based dry cleaning is responsible for approximately 20,000 tons of harmful air emission annually in California alone, and has also contaminated 158 groundwater wells in Southern California in the 12 years ending in 1996.

The wet cleaning process uses water and biodegradable soaps that can be released just as the wastewater from a conventional home washing machine is discharged. A wet cleaning process generates no hazardous solid waste and prevents pollution in water, air and land.

Background on Soledad Vocational Training Program

The CDC's Education Inmate Program Unit operates one of the largest accredited adult correctional education system in the world, providing academic development, vocational training, library services and recreation programs throughout the state's 33 prisons. The adult schools within the prisons are accredited and 1,300 credentialed teachers provide training and instruction to more than 30,000 inmates per month.

The CDC offers inmates training in 12 different vocational areas, the largest of which is dry cleaning. Twenty of the 33 state prisons offer vocational dry cleaning programs. In fiscal year 2000-2001, 4 percent of all inmates participated in the vocational dry cleaning programs. (Prisons are not allowed to compete with businesses and so do not offer their services to local residents.)

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